

# 1998 hunting incidents

## Blaze orange could reduce incidents by 50 %

Is it really safe out there? For most hunters who follow the rules, the answer is yes. For those who don't, here is a reminder of why the 10 commandments of hunter education exist. These safety commandments form the foundation of the Department of Fish and Game's (DFG) Hunter Education Program.

Today's Hunter Education Program has evolved over the years from a four-hour gun safety class into an extensive 10-hour education program, covering topics from hunter safety and gun handling to wildlife management, sportsmanship and ethics, black powder and archery hunting, game care, first aid

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By Jack A. Edwards

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and survival.

The classes are taught by a volunteer force of about 1,000 instructors along with the 265 Game Wardens throughout the state. Hunter Education consists of classroom lectures, demonstrations, and videos. Almost 45 percent of the students have the opportunity to fire a gun at a shooting range during the training. Most students receive field simulation training for hands on experience whenever a shooting range is not available.

Although the DFG makes every effort to instruct and remind hunters about safety, hunting incidents still occur. At the end of each year, DFG experts review every hunting incident looking for the most blatant violations of the safety rules. This information is then passed along to the instructors and used to emphasize safety in the classroom. Information is also supplied to the general public as a way of spotlighting the importance of hunter safety. The tabulations for 1998 have been completed and though the number of hunting incidents remains low, at least half could have been prevented by the use of "blaze orange" clothing.

DFG defines a hunting incident as *any event, which is attributed directly or indirectly to a firearm or bow, and causes the injury or death to any person or persons*

*as a result of a person's actions while hunting.*

Activities such as target shooting, plinking, horseplay (while not hunting), or even cleaning a gun are not classified as hunting incidents. This review only looks at hunting incidents.

In 1998, California hunters were involved in 18 hunting incidents, including two fatalities. This was a reduction in the number of hunting incidents compared to last year. In 1997 there were 25 hunting incidents including one fatality. In 1996 there were 17 hunting incidents including two fatalities, and in 1995 there were 16 hunting incidents with no fatalities. How do these incidents happen?

The most common way is by not being seen, also known as *vision related incidents*. More often than not, the person doing the shooting and the victim are both members of the same hunting party. Vision related incidents occur when the victim moves into the shooter's line of fire, the victim is covered by the shooter while swinging on game, the victim is out of sight of the shooter, or the shooter did not properly identify the target before shooting.

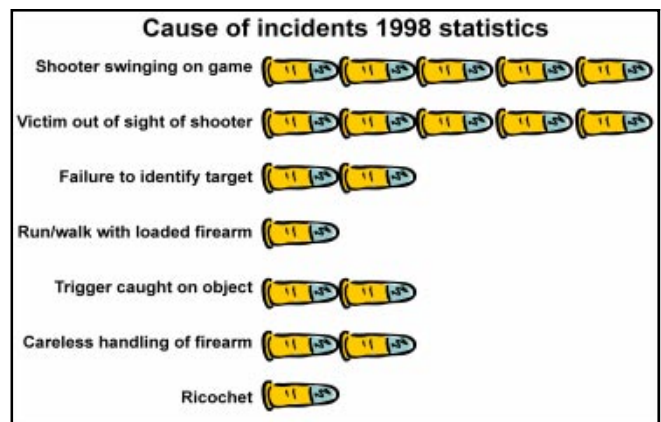
The second most common cause of injury or death is carelessness, resulting in a self-inflicted injury. These shooters stumble and fall, place a loaded handgun in the waistband of their trousers, or

improperly handle a loaded firearm.

A hunter can never afford a second of carelessness while in the field. Once that bullet has been sent on its way, it can never be called back! Two lives would have been saved in 1998 had carelessness or negligence been eliminated.

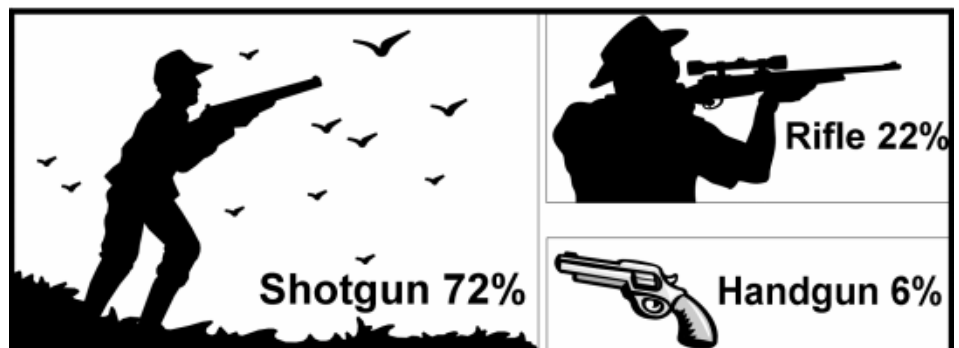
Follow the *Ten Commandments of Hunter Education* and you or a loved one will be around next year to enjoy another hunting season. If you plan to go hunting in the future or just want to learn more about firearms safety, wildlife management, and sportsmanship, take a Hunter Education class. Classes are conducted throughout the state. Anyone desiring a class can check out the DFG's web page at [www.dfg.ca.gov](http://www.dfg.ca.gov) or contact one of the Regional Hunter Education Coordinators.

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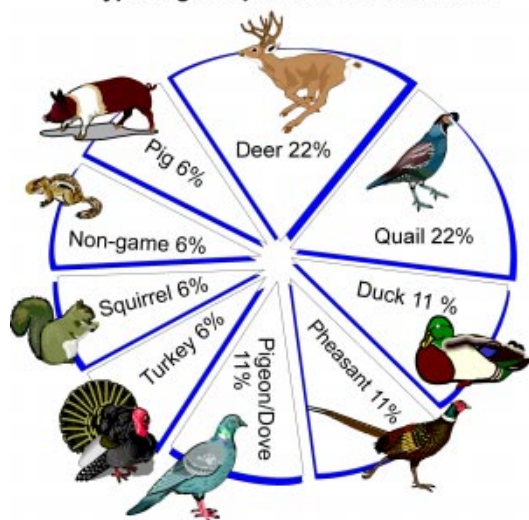


\*Each symbol represents one incident

## Type of firearm used 1998 statistics



Type of game pursued 1998 statistics



## Hunter Education Coordinators

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*Eastern California-Inland Deserts Region*  
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## So how did this year's incidents happen and why?

- Sound shooting (as it is often called) not only violates the basic rule of being sure of your target and what is beyond, but is also an act of gross negligence. Two hunters, both of whom had been drinking, decided to go pig hunting in the late afternoon. The two hunters later split up so they could work a brushy area. The shooter was using a shotgun loaded with double 00 buck shot. Each double 00 buck shot pellet is about the size of a .22 caliber rifle round. The shooter heard some noise in the brush and took a quick shot toward the location of the sound. The shot pellets hit the his partner in the upper torso and head. The injuries were serious, but the victim survived. To compound the issue, they were trespassing on private property. DFG has requested the local District Attorney to pursue negligence charges against the shooter.

- Failing to follow two basic Hunter Education Commandments — be sure of your target and what is beyond it and never shoot at moving animals (except for wing shooting) — resulted in a fatality in 1998. Blaze orange clothing might have saved the victim's life in this incident. The victim and two friends were hunting deer in Siskiyou County. They knew the area and had generally planned their hunt. The shooter strayed from the hunt plan when he jumped a bedded deer. While the deer was making its escape, the hunter took his shot at the fleeing animal. What he did not know was that he was now about to shoot in the direction of where his friend stood, motionless, in full camouflage. If the friend had been wearing blaze orange, he might have been seen before the shooter squeezed

the trigger. But, he wasn't seen, and he was hit by the bullet. The shooter did not know if he hit or missed the deer, and was unaware of the fate of his friend. He hiked up the hill to see if the deer had been hit and found his friend. Unfortunately, this incident has changed his life and those of both families forever.

- A family hunt turned to tragedy when a young boy accidentally shot and wounded his younger brother. The family was hunting along a road when a deer appeared. The older boy and his mother's boyfriend left the vehicle and went into a wooded area to find it. They found the deer after a short search. Although the boy believes he was sure of his target and what was beyond, he had become disoriented during the search and did not see his mother, younger brother and the vehicle on the road lying directly behind the deer. He took the shot — the bullet struck and passed through the deer, continuing on, striking his younger brother in the arm. The shooter was totally unaware of the consequences of his shot. As they hauled the deer to their vehicle, they discovered that the younger brother had been shot. They quickly sought medical assistance. He survived.

- The second fatality of the year might have been avoided if the hunter had only followed the basic rules of removing live rounds from the chamber unless you are ready to shoot and controlling the muzzle at all times. A father accidentally killed his 8-year-old son. The young boy was walking with his father, down a steep slope, holding onto his father's pant leg. The rifle was being carried by a sling over the father's shoulder, with the muzzle pointed down, reportedly with the safety on. They had finished

hunting and were returning to their vehicle. The father was holding on to a tree branch for support when it broke, causing the father to slip and fall. The rifle struck a rock and discharged. The bullet struck the boy in the chest, killing him instantly. Had the gun been unloaded, the incident simply would not have occurred and the boy would have celebrated his ninth birthday this year and the father would not have to live with this tragic day for the rest of his life.

- A father-son duck hunting trip ended abruptly when they failed to follow the commandment, unload your firearm when you are not hunting or using it. Anyone who has spent time in a duck blind has faced the question of what to do with your shotgun when you leave the blind to retrieve a duck or re-arrange your decoys. We all know you should unload the shotgun first, then try to find a nice dry place to place the shotgun. The 30-year-old son had stomped down some tules and placed his shotgun on them before leaving the blind to help his father pick up the decoys at the end of the hunt. Suddenly, he remembered that he forgot to put the safety in the safe position. Apparently he did not think about the fact that he did not unload the shotgun. He returned to the blind, reached in, and grabbed the shotgun by the barrel to retrieve it and set the safety. The trigger caught onto the tules causing the shotgun to discharge, striking him in his right arm. If the shot had been a few inches to the left he might have been shot in the heart or the head. Muzzle control was forgotten in his haste to correct his initial mistake.